

Forth Annual Texas CHARGE RETREAT
By Patti Feagin-Sexton



A bright Texas sun and a cool crisp autumn breeze whispering gently through the giant pines of east Texas, greeted participants and provided a beautiful backdrop to the Fourth Annual Texas CHARGE Retreat. Held on October 23-24th, 2009, at Camp Allen, Navasota TX, the facility is located in the midst of the piney woods of east Texas and as promised gave a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of participant's daily life.

_____ families were welcomed with a total of _____ children participating. Families were greeted on Friday evening receiving their welcome bags including t shirts for each member of their family. A short presentation was made by Kathleen Stremel Thomas who has worked in the area of communication and language assessment and intervention for children with severe disabilities and deaf blindness ofr the past 39 years. Kathleen spoke regarding her research on cochelear implant and intervention for children who are deaf-blind with cochlear implants. She encouraged parents to participate.

Saturday families attended a several general sessions and breakout sessions designed to meet the special needs of each of the family members, including, fathers, mothers, and grandparents.

Saturday's general session began with a presentation by _____ and _____ who spoke about funding and programs available both on state and federal levels to assist families. HIPP, Private Health coverage, SSI, and other resources were discussed and participants were able to field questions regarding obtaining these sources appropriateness for each family.

A presentation was made by _____ on the topic of the importance of "Person Centered Planning". This plan includes reaching out to resources, believing in yourself, and the importance of self education. It was agreed that patience and perseverance in dealing with the system was key in obtaining the services needed. IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act) makes parents and caregivers key players in determining the appropriate levels of education methods for their CHARGE child. Use of

Bio Poems and assessments can not only be useful but are vital in mapping out the education goals for CHARGE students. When planning for Adult Life for individuals with CHARGE it is important to establish a Life Style Plan rather than a program. The use of interveners and extended family support is just as important to plan for in an adult situation.

A parent's panel made up of _____ discussed openly the joys and challenges of being a CHARGE parent. Questions were presented to each member by a facilitator and then general questions from the audience were discussed.

During the breakout sessions, each family member was given an opportunity to discuss their questions, thoughts, and challenges as it pertained to their role. Sessions were emotional and thought provoking but left the participants with the knowledge that they were not alone in their struggles or their joys. As family members each brings a special uniqueness and blessing to their CHARGE family member.

Christopher Sense, 27 year old senior at Texas Tech University and a vocal and steadfast Red Raiders fan, spoke to attendees regarding his struggles in overcoming the physical and emotional challenges of being born with CHARGE. Chris delighted the audience with his power point presentation including the accolades of many personal friends who spoke of Chris' tremendous contributions to the world around him. Chris reminded participants that CHARGE does not have to mean limitations only chances to overcome.

During the various sessions, children participants were entertained with games and rides in the sunny outdoors. Fishing tank, bean bag toss, fire truck and miniature train rides were only a few of the activities provided. Volunteers were assigned to each child and made sure that all of the children, siblings and CHARGERs alike had a fun filled time.

A full moon and cool temperatures in the evening time made for the perfect setting for a Fiesta in the Pines. Spicy Mexican foods, music, piñatas, and a old fashioned campfire gave the participants a chance to have fellowship and networking with other families which made the night memorable to all who attended.

On Sunday the board met to discuss 2010 retreat plans. With the success of this years retreat it was decided that Camp Allen would be a perfect place for 2010.